

CRISIS TOPICS

HIDDEN HISTORY

Almost no studies of crisis situations exist which are adequate to give an understanding of the sequence of decisions and events, in terms of the motives of the high level participants, the [redacted] nature and time-flow of information to them, the events and consideration have captured their attention, the alternative policies they considered and the analyses and evaluation of these alternatives, their uncertainties, apprehensions, hopes and expectations. Few if any students have had access to data bearing directly on these matters even for the US side of the international crises, let alone for the Allied or Soviet bloc decision processes (although there are studies, both public and private, whose authors seem ignorant of the inadequacies of the data actually available to them.) We may consider some reasons for this, the extent for this state of affairs, the extent to which it means that some of its consequences, and the extent to which it may be remediable.

A great deal of the relevant information prior to the outbreak of a crisis will typically come through clandestine intelligence channels. It is therefore subject to special/clearances and to special handling. Researchers without these clearances will not, typically, know what they do not know; they will be ignorant even of the existence of such procedures and these sorts of data, and the experience of past studies shows that gaps in the data available to them or the puzzling features in its apparent patterns do not, in practice, lead researchers to suspect the existence of large

amounts of data to which they had not received access. This leads them to both highly distorted impressions of the available to high level decision makers prior to enduring the crisis, and hence wrong guesses as to the decision makers' expectations, apprehensions/and immediate goals, and to unwarranted concessions by the researchers in the reliability of their conclusions. The same results have followed from denying researchers access to certain other kinds of closely held data.

A. A good deal of communication internal to a given department is stamped "eyes only" for the head of that department or for the immediate addressee, or is otherwise highly restricted in dissemination. These messages of memos tend to be segregated and handled separately and it seems difficult for a researcher from a given department to get access to such material from some other department.

B. White House internal memos and directives receive special handling and are particularly hard to get at. This is particularly serious for the study of crises, since presidential decision is centrally important in crisis situations.

C. A great deal of important during crises is transacted on the telephone, leaving no trail (or a sporadic trail of telcons, which are particularly closely held).

D. [REDACTED] For a variety of reasons discussed elsewhere, staffs in various departments may not be as well informed of the information available to their superiors or their superiors' preoccupations as is customary; therefore, interviews with even the closest staff assistants,

and written staffed support, may be less reliable than usual as a guide to the thinking of high level decision makers.

E. Even among the highest level of decision makers, the pressure of events and the extreme privacy of some of the planning or international negotiations may keep individuals from having a comprehensive view of the information available for the actions under consideration; again, even these cabinet level officers may not know what they do not know, and have a quite distorted view of their colleague's activities or presidential intentions. This limits their value as sources.

F. The very existence of a crisis creates some presumption or suspicion of governmental failure: In predicting, in preparing and planning, in deterring or preventing unfavorable events. This creates from the outset of the crisis a defensive attitude toward examination of the governmental decision making process. Even where a thoroughly full examination of all the information available to the government and all of its responses would absolve the administration from any taint of failure, there is reason to fear that the partial